

# Superb Wanderers storm to third title in four years

"WE are the champions!" That's the cry that echoed around Loakes Park at 4.45 p.m. on Saturday when scores of jubilant fans invaded the pitch to salute their team. Wycombe Wanderers had just won the first ever Rothmans Isthmian League title — and they did it with a superb display of attacking football.

Thanks to Hendon, who beat Bishop's Stortford 1-0 on Thursday, Wanderers needed only to beat Leytonstone on Saturday to clinch the championship outright. They did it with a magnificent first half display, which although producing only one goal, set them up for the kill in the second. Victory was Wycombe's — and how they deserved it.

It hardly mattered that, in winning the title, they also achieved their 11th £40 bonus from the sponsors for a third clear goal triumph. The big prize, though, is the £1,000 for finishing top of the league. Treasurer Roger Lee wore a grin as wide as the pitch itself after the game. Small wonder, Roger, who struggles to keep the club in the black throughout the season, will receive a total of around £1,700. Added to the £1,000, the Blues have won £440 for three goal victories and they can also expect a handsome chunk of the sportsmanship pool when it is worked out later in the year.

But what about the manager who steered his club to this memorable triumph? Brian Lee brought a new dimension to Wycombe football when he took over five years ago. In his very first season Wanderers finished runners up. Next year they won the Isthmian League and kept the title the following year, scoring over 100 goals in the process. Last year was a failure in comparison — the Blues finishing fourth. Now Lee has come back again to make it an incredible record of three championships in four years.

The manager has always maintained the championship comes before the Amateur Cup. Few can argue. His team have kept up a consistently high standard over the season — 42 matches long — whereas the cup lasts a mere six games. During those 42 matches, Wanderers have

played some wonderful football of a standard matching Third and Fourth Division soccer of the Football League — and sometimes better. Added to that, they have conceded only one booking (for shirt pulling) this term — a tribute to their clean football.

For sheer consistency alone they fully deserve their triumph.

But there is more to it than that. One must not forget the Wycombe fans — surely the best amateur football followers in the country. Two thousand of them turned out to cheer on their heroes, a remarkable figure considering the England — Scotland international was being screened live the same afternoon. Banners and scarves waving, they played a key part in Wycombe's success against Leytonstone on Saturday and throughout the season. The scenes after the game, with the fans sharing the champions' champagne on the pitch and chairing their winning captain around the field, will long be remembered. It was the perfect end to the season.

But before these moments of glory, Wycombe had to get down to the task in hand of beating Leytonstone. They had already won 2-1 away the previous Wednesday, the two sides fielding almost the same teams, Leytonstone changing the substitute.

In the past Wycombe have struggled in these "all or nothing" encounters, notably in cup games. I, for one, expected the Blues to show some kind of nerves, but apart from some rather hurried finishing, their football was even better than one had dared to expect. From

the first three minutes when they created three chances, there looked only one winner.

Keith Searle was wide after just 60 seconds, then Tony Horseman couldn't get his full power behind a shot a minute later. After three minutes Roger Grant tricked Les Tilley on the flank but Searle was just unable to reach his cross. It augured

well for Wycombe.

Leytonstone just hadn't had a chance to settle when Wanderers stormed forward again. This time Horseman raced between the two central defenders and onto Tilley's weak pass back but "Bodger", not wanting to risk a shot on his left foot, turned inside and sent the ball just past the far post.

At the stage, Wanderers were irresistible. Larry Pritchard and Terry Reardon were combining superbly in the middle and setting up brilliant attacks for the front runners. The passing was executed with rare precision and the Stones defence were powerless to halt it. But there was still the nagging feeling that, for all their pressure, Wycombe might not be able to finish off their excellent raids.

Even the crossbar came to the visitors' rescue in the 17th minute. Horseman's corner was half cleared to Dave Bullock who crossed again into the box. Keith Mead rose head and shoulders above the rest to send in a header but the ball struck the crossbar and was cleared for another flag kick.

When Horseman, who at this stage was running about like a 15 year old, ballooned the ball over the crossbar from six yards after being presented with a glorious

chance from Pritchard, things were beginning to look ominous for Wycombe. Leytonstone's defence was often stripped naked by the passing skills of the home side — and yet the numerous attacks weren't producing goals.

Then, with 26 minutes gone, Wycombe's pressure was rewarded. Once again, the

Stones paid the price for their lack of speed in the middle of their defence. The ball came out of the Wycombe back four to Horseman, back in midfield. Tony sent a slide-rule pass through the middle but at first, it seemed Tilley had plenty of time to deal with the attack. But he reckoned without the searing speed of Mick Holfield, who nipped in and robbed the international full back and as John Murphy came out, clipped the ball over his head.

There was no respite for the visitors. Three minutes later another fine move ended with Perrin heading over the bar. Leaving their flanks badly exposed while the speed of Wycombe's strikers always threatening through the middle, they were constantly on the rack. Wycombe swapped their raids by occasionally using the high ball for Searle to lay-off but mainly played along the ground. Passing accuracy and intelligent running off the ball was the key to some of their best football of the season in the first half hour.

Home 'keeper John Maskell, not a man for the big occasion, was not troubled until the 36th minute when he safely held a high cross from Bobby Hames. In the first half Leytonstone had the ball in the Wycombe penalty

area just three times — an example of the Blues' overall supremacy.

However, when Horseman headed straight at Murphy from a couple of yards following a Reardon free kick and Holfield's 44th minute effort was kicked off the line by Tilley, Wycombe had only the one goal to show for all their efforts in the

first half. At half time people were justifiably asking, was it enough?

If Wanderers could continue their first half barrage the answer was a resounding yes. Inevitably, however, they went off the boil in the early stages of the second half. The pace of their game on a humid day began to take its toll while the moving of John Charles into midfield and Chappell into the back four made matters tougher.

If Leytonstone were to make any impact on this game, now was the time. They almost made the most of their chance. In the first minute after the break Paul Birdseye and Pritchard tripped over each other to give Brian Harvey a free cross on the left but there was no-one in the middle to knock the ball home and it sailed right across the six yard box without being touched.

The closest the Stones came to an equaliser was in the 52nd minute. Harvey again crossed from the left and Charles darting in at the far post, managed to get a touch which was deflected away.

Wycombe fans were getting worried. The slick passing of the first half just wasn't there and the ball was being played in the air far too much. It took 17

minutes before they really began to click again.

Almost inevitably it was Holfield who regained the initiative. Picking up the ball on half way he set off on a run, beat three defenders one after another before being robbed by Chappell at the expense of a corner. From Horseman's flag kick Bullock blazed the ball over the top on the volley.

Soon afterwards Searle completely misjudged a header and Perrin drove at least two foot wide when well placed. In the 74th minute, however, skipper Larry Pritchard showed his strikers how it should be done, by starting and finishing a superb move. On half way, he slipped the ball to Birdseye who in turn fed Horseman. Collecting the return pass, Pritchard flighted a cross to the far post where Searle turned and centred again. Pritchard, far from finished with the raid, raced in and headed powerfully towards the top corner. Murphy, who had pulled off a brilliant save from the same player on Wednesday, could only help the ball on its way on this occasion.

That was it. Leytonstone had little chance of pulling back two goals and the pressure was now well and truly off Wanderers. To reinforce midfield, Brian Lee replaced Perrin with Phil Wood, who moved into midfield while Holfield operated between the middle and front three.

It was fitting that Pritchard should notch the final goal in the 86th minute. Birdseye, who had a fine game at right back, took a long throw which was back headed into the six yard box by Horseman at the near post. Holfield got in a shot which was blocked on the line but there was Pritchard to ram home the rebound and complete the victory and a marvellous season for Wycombe Wanderers.

**WYCOMBE:** J. Maskell (P. Birdseye, K. Mead, D. Bullock, R. Grant, L. Pritchard, T. Reardon, M. Holfield, A. Horseman, K. Searle, S. Perrin (sub P. Wood 61 mins)).

**LEYTONSTONE:** J. Murphy, L. Tilley, J. Charles, M. Smith, B. Hames, S. Smith, J. Roseman (sub G. Chappell 46 mins), D. Ishmail, W. Ratty, J. Brooks, B. Harvey.

**Referee:** P. Taylor (Greenford).

**Half time:** 1-0. **Goalscorers:** Wycombe 3, Leytonstone 0.

**Approximate total attendance:** 2,500.

## By STUART EARP Wycombe Wanderers 3, Leytonstone 0

## BLUES' PRESENTATION NIGHT

**LARRY PRITCHARD**, Wycombe Wanderers' captain, will receive the Isthmian League trophy and championship flag tomorrow night (Wednesday) before the representative match between the Rothmans Isthmian League and the Hellenic League at Loakes Park (k.o. 7.30 p.m.). League secretary Ingram Whittingham will make the award.

As well as the trophy (won last year by Hendon for this time), Wanderers will be receiving approximately £1,700 from the sponsors at the league's dinner in June. The players will also be presented with plaques at the dinner.

The match promises to be entertaining with several internationals in the Isthmian line-up

and also four Wycombe men.

Rothmans Isthmian League XI: Peter Harris (Oxford City), Tony Jennings (Enfield), Alan Phillips (Wales and Hendon), David Reid (Leatherhead), Ray Eaton (England and Enfield), Terry Reardon (England and Wycombe), Alan Evans (Oxford City), Lennie Pritchard (England and Wycombe), Chris Kelly (England and Leatherhead), Howard Kettleborough (Hitchin Town), Paul Giggie (Hitchin Town), John Davie (Kingstonian), Tony Horseman (Wycombe Wanderers), Steve Perrin (Wycombe Wanderers), Reserve

goalkeeper John Maskell (Wycombe Wanderers), manager Brian Lee (Wycombe Wanderers).

**Hellenic League XI:** J. Utteridge (Moreton Town), A. Challinor (Bicester Town), W. Prior (Didcot Town), L. Cocher (Moreton Town), C. Shephard (Moreton Town), R. White (Clenfield), M. Symmonds (Thatcham), D. Freeman (Clanfield), D. Wiles (Wantage Town), D. Watts (Hungerford Town), N. Farr (Moreton Town), I. Richardson (Ch. Norton), T. Wilkin (Abingdon Town), M. King (Abingdon Town), B. Knight (Thame United), J. Lamb (Hungerford Town).

# Latest table

	P	W	D	L	P	A	Pts
Wycombe Wanderers	42	27	9	6	96	34	90
Hendon	42	25	13	4	63	20	88
Bishop's Stortford	41	26	8	7	77	25	86
Dulwich Hamlet	42	22	11	9	71	38	77
Leatherhead	42	23	6	13	81	44	75
Woking	42	22	6	14	63	55	72
Walton & Horsham	41	20	11	10	87	49	71
Leytonstone	42	20	9	13	63	44	69
Ilford	42	20	8	14	60	44	68
Hayes	42	17	14	11	65	43	65
Oxford City	42	15	15	11	45	47	61
Sutton United	42	13	16	13	51	52	55
Hitchin Town	42	15	10	17	68	73	55
Barking	42	14	12	16	57	58	54
Kingstonian	42	12	16	15	47	48	51
Tooting & Mitcham	42	14	9	19	57	62	51
Enfield	42	13	11	18	50	57	60
Walthamstow Ave	42	11	13	18	46	62	42
Bromley	42	7	9	26	37	81	30
Clapton	42	8	3	31	36	128	27
St. Albans C.	42	4	7	31	30	82	19
Corinthian Cas.	42	3	4	35	31	107	13

